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## GREAT BRITAIN IN ASIA.

BY THE RIGHT HON. SIR RICHARD TEMPLE, BART.

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At a moment when the British Empire is gravely exercised by a war in the Antipodes, to result, as we hope, in a victorious issue and an honorable settlement, it is well to consider what its position is in Asia, and whether that is at all affected by our pre-occupations and avocations for the moment elsewhere.

If, in modern phrase, stock were to be taken of Great Britain's Asiatic belongings, the sum total would be magnificent, practically immense, exceeding effectively that of any other Power, of white or dark race, in that quarter of the globe. In the first place stands the Indian Empire, with an area of nearly two millions of square miles and a population of nearly three hundred millions of souls—figures which alone equal those of the Continent of Europe. But outside this Empire, and often in connection with it, there have grown, and are growing daily, various possessions and interests, forming, as it were, a vast chain of imperial affairs. Let these be momentarily recollected in geographical order.

From her base at Suez, Great Britain looks out on the Red Sea. She further extends her potential vision over that sea from Suakin, on the African side and in Egyptian territory. At Jedda, on the Arabian side, the gateway, so to speak, of Mecca, she has a dominating influence, and from ships under her flag or from her dominions are landed the pilgrims who travel by sea. At the very mouth of the Sea is the Island of Perim, merely a rock indeed, but one on which the British standard is flying. Just outside the mouth is the first-class fortress and coaling station of Aden, a volcanic formation often called the Gibraltar of the East. From this point the southeastern corner of Arabia, known to geographers as Arabia Felix, is dominated. It is not necessary here to recount how this position is supported by British control

over Socotra, commonly reckoned an African island, and over the opposite coast of Africa called Somalie. But enough has been said to show how Britain commands the Red Sea, one of the most important of her water highways on the face of the globe. The Royal Mail which passes weekly up and down this way, carrying dispatches for India, China and Australia, is probably the largest in the world.

Round the corner from Aden comes the sea approach to the Persian Gulf, a sea known to geographers as the Gulf of Oman, to poets as "Oman's green waters," and there lies Muscat, a place in the closest relations with Britain, as was recently and forcefully shown in a certain transaction with France. Inside the Persian Gulf are the two ports of Bender Abbas and Bushire, ports which though in Persian territory have heretofore been distinctly under British influence. Near the head of the Gulf is the island of Karak, once occupied by a British force. Heretofore, the maritime police of the Gulf, the suppression of piracy and the protection of the fisheries, pearl and other, have been managed by British warships. The Gulf has indeed been regarded by Anglo-Indian statesmen as a British lake. Into the head of the Gulf are discharged the united waters of the Euphrates and the Tigris, the confluence taking place above Basra or Bussorah, about a hundred miles from the coast. From the Gulf up to Bussorah the river is navigable for the ships of war, and the maritime control has been British also. In Persia itself, throughout the northern part of that kingdom, near the Caspian, Russia has asserted for herself a paramount position. But for the southern half of the kingdom Britain has a similar position fully as great, if she continues to assert it as well as she has hitherto done. Adjoining the Gulf is Beluchistan. A portion of that is Persian, but Beluchistan proper is British, and to that may be added Mekran, which carries on the coast line to near the mouths of the Indus.

North of this lies Afghanistan, which is under British protection, of which the boundaries, as against the coterminous Russian territory, have been marked off by British Commissioners meeting Russian Commissioners at the request of the Afghans, and which is under British suzerainty and within the Red Line. Yet further north rises the plateau of Pamir, mostly snow-clad, which has been divided between Britain and Russia.

Returning to India, we see Ceylon in equatorial latitudes and

commanding the entrance to the Bay of Bengal. Now that Burma and Tenasserim, with regions right up to the Chinese frontier, have been added to the Indian Empire, that great Bay is unquestionably a British lake. Onward from this Bay lies Siam, in which Britain has an equal interest with France, and for the independence of which there is a joint British and French guarantee. Heretofore it is the East to which attention has been directed. But now it will be the Far East to which thought must be turned.

The gateway of the Far East consists of the British possessions in and about the Strait of Malacca. Here is the fortified coaling station of Singapore, one of the keys of Asia, and second only to Aden in importance; by many, indeed, the two places might be deemed sisters in imperial importance. Thus the reader in imagination emerges on the Chinese waters and soon arrives at Hong Kong, a fortified island, with its strip of adjacent coast, commanding the mouth of one of the great rivers of China, a busy centre of Chinese commerce and a first-rate coaling station. Further north again is Shanghai, another centre of Chinese commerce, dominated by British merchants and virtually commanding the mouths of the Yangtse Kiang, the greatest of all Chinese rivers. Further north comes the Gulf of Pechili, which, branching from the China sea, runs right up towards Peking, and close underneath the southern shore of Manchuria. Near the mouth of this Gulf is the naval and military station of Wei-hai-Wei, which gives to Britain, in that vitally important Gulf, as good a position as that which she has in the Mediterranean.

Thus it will be seen how the southern and eastern portions of Asia, which are incomparably the richest and most populous, come to be either owned or controlled by Britain. The western and northern, and even the central portions, which are wholly inferior in fertility and in all resources—except mineral—may be owned or controlled by others. Of the sum total of European ocean-borne trade, the main bulk belongs to Britain; the remainder may be divided among other nations. Such, then, is the present British portion, as yet uniquely favorable. The immediate question is whether it is likely to be diminished or endangered by the general trend of events, by the conduct of other European Powers, or by anything consequent on the present war in the Antipodes.

An imaginative survey will remind the British reader of what the Persian ambassador in the days of Darius said, to the effect

that his master's rule extended so far north as to be frozen with perpetual frost, and so far south as to be glowing in perpetual heat.

Now, it is generally recognized that, whatever may be the conduct of the Continental press or the popular sentiment among the leading nationalities, the language and attitude of the several European Governments have been diplomatically correct. So far, no complaint on the British side has arisen. Nevertheless, certain movements have taken place, which may perhaps have been in previous contemplation, but which do affect some of the Asiatic interests of Britain as already described, and which have assumed particular activity since, say, the autumn of 1899. They synchronize, so to speak, with the fact of Britain's being much occupied in the Antipodes. The coincidence of time is, indeed, curiously suggestive.

As is well known, Russia has for some time past had a line of railway from the Caspian Sea eastward on to Bokhara and Samarcand; and to all that no objection could, under existing circumstances, be made. But from that line she has recently constructed a branch right up to a place named Kushk, on the Afghan frontier, near Herat, the capital of Western Afghanistan. She had technically and lawfully a right to do this. Nevertheless, her doing so was an unfriendly act towards Britain. It was not done for any sufficient commercial reason. The real object must have been to menace British interests and to disturb the minds of the Afghans. Still, whatever she might think, Britain could not so far remonstrate. But now Russia has sent, within the last few months, a body of troops to this place, Kushk, facing the line of British protectorate. As was doubtless anticipated, this move has caused much remark all over Asia. Thus this dispatch of troops was a still more unfriendly act, at which Britain may well take umbrage. It lays Russia open to the imputation of trying to profit (we hope quite vainly) by Britain's preoccupation in the Antipodes, and of doing that which she would hardly have ventured to do had Britain been wholly disengaged.

Again, Russia has long been known to have in contemplation some plan of railways in Persia. So long as that plan was confined to the northern half of that kingdom, Britain could hardly object, for no doubt Russian influence is preponderating there. But, as regards railways in the southern half, the arrangements

for them ought to be Britain's affair. Nevertheless, just at the present time, it is announced that Russia has obtained concessions from the Shah of Persia that would allow of railways being prolonged right down to the Persian Gulf. Here again is a direct menace to the British position in Asia. As usual, the precise facts as touching British interests are not, perhaps cannot be, made known to the public in Britain. Doubtless, there is some diplomatic correspondence going on; the limits of the concessions may not have been settled; probably Britain will have something serious to say to the Shah of Persia before the arrangement is concluded; and ultimately British interests may be vindicated. Meanwhile, it is well to take note of the disposition of Russia, as evinced by any such extensive attempt being made at such a time as the present. How the capital is to be found for these Persian railways, what trade or traffic there can be to pay the interest on the outlay, and who will defray the interest charges if the lines do not pay—these are questions for Russia to answer. It remains only to remark that, if she is from her own treasury to subsidize these railways should they prove unremunerative, she must have a political purpose. And that can only be to assert a political position in Southern Asia, inconvenient to the just and the long established interests of Britain.

Again, it is at this time that Germany has arranged with Turkey a concession for a railway from some point in Asia Minor to the basin of the Tigris and Euphrates, to Bagdad, at least, and perhaps onwards. This is a project which has been often mooted in Britain, but never undertaken, because the line did not seem likely to prove remunerative and because the communication by land did not appear able to compete with the existing communication by sea, and because there was no prospect of local or intermediate traffic to justify the outlay. These considerations apply equally to Germany, and, though banks are employed, there must be some state subsidy or support, substantial even though indirect. For such outlay from German resources—and it will come to that in some way or other—there must be a reason. That must be the extension of trade ultimately by political expansion; though the commercial profit to meet the German national expense can be, not at all in the present, but only in the remote future.

But expansion in this direction is approaching the British sphere too near to be pleasant. For, if a German line reaches

Bagdad, is it to be extended to Bussorah, of which the situation has been already described? If so, then is German influence to extend to the mouth of the joint river and to the coast of the Persian Gulf? This is, indeed, a grave question for Britain; inasmuch as any participation by a European Power in the control of the Persian Gulf is a distinct derogation from the British position as heretofore maintained in that quarter.

In the Far East, the consolidation of Japan, the settlement of her political constitution, the development of her forces by sea and land, are all favorable to British interests. In the Japanese Britain has a really friendly Power, on the eastern flank quite able to hold its own against Russia or other ambitious European Power.

The appearance of the United States of America in the Philippine Islands is convenient and apparently beneficial to British interests, and may serve in part as a counterpoise to any possible combination of Russia, France and Germany. Although Germany has in some instances acted excellently well with Britain, yet in the transactions following on the peace after the war between Japan and China she acted with France and Russia, while Britain withheld approbation.

Further, it is now understood that American diplomacy has secured the recognition by all the European Powers of the policy of the "open door" in China, implying that they all agree to keep all ports of which they may have the control within Chinese limits quite free, and without any duties, differential or other, levied against any one. If this really be secured, without any reservations or countervailing hindrances, it will be a boon to British interests. Indeed, it is the very thing for which British merchants throughout China have long been contending. Although they may obtain by far the largest commercial sphere of all—if China were to be partitioned out into spheres—they do not wish to have a sphere at all. For then they would have certain access to their own sphere only; in neighboring spheres they might be hindered; indeed, according to the heretofore established policy of other nations, they positively would be. They say in effect that British trade runs throughout all parts of China without exception; that, wherever British trade is, there is the sphere of Britain! Thus they will see in the general recognition of the "open door," by other nations, a blessed relief from disputes with

their European neighbors, and from embarrassments without end. This will be especially the case with British affairs in Manchuria, in which province Russia has so entirely superseded Chinese authority, in many respects, that she might easily, if so minded, oppose obstacles to long established British enterprises, commercial and industrial, in that quarter. Much trouble was apprehended in this respect, as British merchants in Manchuria were not likely to submit to the usual Russian procedure. But, if there is to be the "open door" in Manchuria, Britain may be glad, for really the prospect was almost too good to hope for.

There is, also, one particular trouble with France looming on the horizon of Southern China. Britain is establishing a through line of imperial communication from the Bay of Bengal to the Chinese waters on the Pacific Ocean; that is from Rangoon, at the mouth of the Irrawaddy of Burma, to Shanghai, near the mouth of the Yangtse Kiang of China. This route is to pass through Burmese railways to the borders of the Chinese province of Yunnan; negotiations are in progress with China for carrying on the line through Yunnan; thus the province of Czechuen would be reached, and then the lower course of the Yangtse Kiang, which would be controlled by gunboats from Shanghai. Whatever lines in China may be marked out by other Powers, this is *par excellence* the British line, and nobody knows this better than the French Government. The fact has been recognized by Russia, who gave Britain an agreement not to promote any railways near this line, in return for an agreement by Britain not to promote any railways in Manchuria. Nevertheless, France is striving to set up, as it were, a fence across this very line, just as she did across the line of British advance up the Nile at Fashoda. She is now asserting some shadowy rights in Yunnan; and she has recently, according to common report, been dispatching surveyors and other agents to search out the land in that quarter. All this on her part is incompatible with the maintenance of the British line. We are ready to respect whatever portions she may have acquired or may yet fairly acquire in China: but we expect her to do the same by us.

From this summary review of the British position in Asia, it is manifest that Britain from her imperial watchtower ought to be perpetually on the lookout to descry, discern, detect the beginning of future trouble. Transactions are undertaken by the



European Powers, who, though they be friendly in a national sense, are yet commercially and politically jealous of British predominance, and would rejoice at any reduction or weakening of the British position. Often such transactions may, to a cursory or short-sighted view, appear innocuous at first, and yet may ultimately lead to evil conjunctures and complications. Britain, looking far behind her to see how often in Asiatic history this has happened to her, should look far before her, to beware in time before matters have gone too far for retrieval.

Whether the present is a fitting time for other Powers to try any contests with Britain, is a question for them to determine. Britain is at the acme of her "puissance"; never has she displayed such resourcefulness as she has recently displayed in South Africa, and yet her resources are very far from exhaustion; indeed, they have not even yet been adequately called forth. She is still ready to meet any combination that could reasonably be anticipated, and if the present war shall be speedily terminated, then she will have forces available in a strength never before equalled in all her eventful history. She can afford to regard other nations quite complacently, whatever they may say, realizing what her rights are throughout the world and knowing well how to guard them.

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